

Chapter III

THE SCHOOL LIBRARY SUPERVISOR IN THE
CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Mildred L. Nickel

The expression "community unit" is not well known; in Illinois it is used to designate a school district in which consolidation has taken place, with one board of education and one administrator for all twelve grades. In the school year 1944-45 there were 11,955 individual school districts in Illinois, each with its own board of education. Included in this number were 9,680 one-teacher elementary schools. Today there are 2,349 school districts, or 9,606 less than there were ten years ago. Of this number 327 are community unit districts.

The original law permitting the formation of a community unit district was enacted in 1947. It provided that an election be called at which time the voters would decide whether or not they wanted such a district. A petition for the election must be signed by 200 or more legal voters of the district; a maximum tax rate not to exceed \$1.50 for educational purposes and 25 ¢ for building purposes was to be established; the territory for the new district must be compact and contiguous, must have at least 2000 inhabitants, and must have an assessed valuation of six million dollars or more. Individual school buildings are known as "attendance centers." These must be provided for grades one through twelve, and free transportation must be provided for all pupils living over one and one-half miles from a school center.

What does a community unit district look like? It is impossible to give a definite answer because each one is different. Usually there is one high school. The number of attendance centers varies from one to as many as nineteen or twenty. Enrollment varies from about 200 to 6,000 with the average falling in the 500-1000 group. The number of square miles included varies, also; some cover large areas and others have all attendance centers actually centered in one locality.

The purpose of any consolidation program is to provide a broader educational program for the boys and girls. Some of the most obvious improvements noted in community unit districts are that new buildings have been erected, old ones have been remodeled, and many one-teacher schools have been closed. The curriculum has been expanded to include music, art, physical education, vocational subjects, and programs for the handicapped. Services have been greatly enlarged, also. One now finds music supervisors, art supervisors, speech correctionists, school nurses, guidance directors, and librarians working on a unit-wide program. Hot lunch programs are to

be found in most attendance centers. More instructional aids are provided: projectors, tape recorders, record players, radios, maps, art supplies, and library materials.

Unit-wide programs of library service are gaining momentum each year. There are no accurate figures available concerning the number of districts with full-time trained librarians, but the number is growing. In some instances the high school librarian serves merely as a clearing house for ordering new materials for the elementary grades. There are many effective programs, but no two of them are alike, since each district is different. This is as it should be, since the library program in any situation should be geared to meet local needs. It follows naturally that the work of a librarian serving one or two attendance centers will differ from that of one serving fifteen attendance centers scattered over many miles.

The following are some basic recommendations which have been established by a state-wide committee of school librarians:

1. The school librarian in any school must have a teachers' certificate.
2. The librarian of a community unit district should know the curriculum, as well as each teacher's methods of teaching. He should then work with these teachers by demonstrating to them that the librarian wants to serve them by knowing and even anticipating their needs.
3. Book selection aids should be provided for all teachers.
4. Community unit district librarians should make regular visits to all attendance centers as often as necessary.
5. The ordering and processing of all materials should be centralized.
6. Central records should be kept of all the holdings in the entire unit. In most instances this consists of a central shelf list and a unit card catalog. Ideally there would be a shelf list and catalog in each building too, but practices vary.
7. A central office-work area is needed, one that is not a part of a school library. In other words, if this central office is in the high school, it should not be in the work room of the high school library, under ordinary circumstances.
8. All library materials throughout the unit should be mobile, or fluid, moving within the building and even from building to building as they may be needed. At least three districts today use a bookmobile to serve rural areas; some transport materials by using the school truck or a school bus, while others allow the librarian mileage to use his own car.

9. A more functional library program is possible if there is a central library in each building. This may not always be possible, but many schools are utilizing wide corridors or large landings on stairways to centralize the book collection. In those schools with no central library, however, materials should still be mobile and not considered the private property of any one teacher.
10. It would be well for at least one teacher in each building to have some training in library science, preferably a course in the selection and use of materials.
11. A school which has twenty or more teachers is large enough to employ a full-time librarian.
12. Reading centers, with open book shelves, should be provided in each classroom.
13. An adequate budget should be established. It has been found that a minimum expenditure of \$1.50 per pupil each year for the purchase of books alone will be adequate in most cases. Additional funds should be budgeted for the purchase of encyclopedias, magazines, supplies, sets of readers, equipment, etc.

A recent questionnaire asked for the strongest part of the present library program in unit districts. Answers indicated that they now have more and better materials available to all, they are more easily accessible, the teachers and pupils use more materials, and administrators are cooperating better. When asked for the weakest part of the program, the replies indicated that trained school librarians are needed, as are more central libraries, more money, more clerical help, wider use by more teachers, and more mobility between buildings. It was encouraging to note that future plans indicate that more school librarians will be trained, more money will be available, teachers will be encouraged to participate to a greater extent, and central libraries will be established. One administrator wrote that he "sees the need" and "we are trying." This is a new profession, or widening of the horizons of an old one, but it is an accomplished fact that more boys and girls and more teachers are having the advantage of an enriched library program than ever before.